

# No fools in April

One of the earliest images (from around 225 CE) we have of Christ being worshipped is of a man in



front of a crucified figure. The caption reads 'Alexamenos worships his god'. This is thought to be an anti-Christian piece of work – or certainly an anti-Alexamenos one! But the representation of Christ is the real curiosity for it shows Jesus as having a donkey's head. Donkeys were thought of as foolish creatures, something we see in

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where a village workman is made to have an ass's head and falls in love with a fairy queen.



In the first chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about foolishness and how, on the one hand we are called to be fools for Christ, proclaiming a gospel that makes us look stupid and naïve, to have faith in a man that was crucified was considered exceedingly stupid and it was, as Paul says, a stumbling block to faith in Jesus for many people then and now.

On the other hand, Paul talks about the foolishness of God being wiser than the wisdom of man. I Corinthians 1, 23 -25;

...we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,<sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.<sup>25</sup> For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

But those of you who read carefully will have noticed a sleight of hand here in my writing. I have made it look as if foolishness and stupidity are one and the same – which they are not. 'Stupid' is not

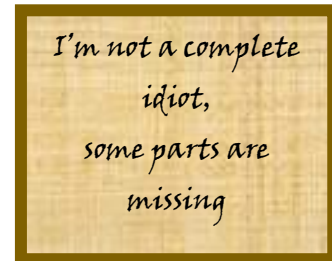


using the brains you were born with to think something through. We may think of it as dull-witted but stupidity is not so much about mental ability as mental willingness. A fool though, is someone like a jester, far from dull-witted but agile of thought and sharp as a pin and, in kingly courts of old, expected to speak truth to power where others would simply fawn and flatter. How many of our current day 'kings' could do with someone to speak truth in their ears! Again, to quote the Bard, 'jesters do oft prove prophets' as Shakespeare says in *King Lear*, a play which examines foolishness in all its guises from stupid folk to

professional wit via old age folly, and malice which gets its come-uppance. Jesters use humour to teach deep truths, sugaring the pill. It's why Jesus used parables and why so much of His words are full of humour – if only we could take off the 'must-be-serious specs' and perceive them.

How does this affect the Christian? How are we to be fools for Christ and speak truth to our hearts and those around us?

Not by being daft about life and doing reckless things that threaten our health and that of those around us. Not by behaving as if forgiveness is a gift to be taken for granted as we habitually do those things which, by omission or commission hurt others deeply ('we have not done those things which we ought to have done and have done those things which we ought not to have done' as the old prayer book puts it). Not by pretending that all will be well and just let things go by without taking action against climate change, poverty, waste or other things which engage us and challenge our sense of justice. Not by failing to think about our faith and doing what Jesus tells us when He says '**You shall worship the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your mind ...**') Too many Christians want a 'simple faith' which is fine if you are 'simple' but many of us are far from this. 'Engage brain before putting mouth in gear' as the fridge magnet philosopher has it. I think that those of us capable of tertiary level education owe it *to God* to do this with our faith and explore the wonderful intellectual integrity it has.



So what to do then to be good fools for Christ? To follow where we believe He is leading which may indeed make us look foolish in the eyes of those lead by seemingly brighter lights. To give from the depth of our pockets and the depths of our hearts. To go beyond reason and act from love. 'God so loved the world...' says John, not 'God so thought the world'. It was not as an act of capricious amusement that God called the world into being but as an action of love, God sharing the joy of being alive with us hence we are made in God's image, capable of great creativity and great compassion.



At the point of decision reason fails us and we go with our hearts be it the colour of the car ('resale value' or 'the kids/wife/granny... like it') the location of the house (Cotswolds or Trondheim?!) or following Christ when there is nothing to commend Him other than that He seems to make just about more sense than the others who attract us, as Peter says in John 6.6. As Easter draws on, the common sense (intelligence) of the common good will keep us separate yet a while but the common sense (feeling) of us as a community of praying, worshipping and joyful Christians will hold to eternity. 'Speak the truth in love' as Paul says (Ephesians 4. 15) not out of malice, but do speak the truth that Christ teaches us which is no folly nor ignorance but grace personified (John 1.14).

**And the Word became flesh  
and dwelt among us,  
and we have seen his glory,  
the glory as of a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth.**